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ABSTRACT

When researchers and practitioners in early childhood care and education interact, outcomes are often disappointing to both. It is likely that a new brand of professionals, capable of living in the cultures of both the researcher and the practitioner, will bridge the gap. These professionals will be found mostly in intermediary organizations, establishing themselves between governmental structures, research institutions, and people working directly with children. Intermediaries, particularly those in non-governmental organizations, can provide a testing ground for any intervention model or theory. This paper discusses those people who form the interface between theory and practice, and contains the following sections: (1) "Programme Developers of Funding Agencies"; (2) "Decision Making by Programme Developers"; (3) "Programme Developers as Development Specialists"; (4) "Networking," pointing out the lack of connection between the research communities of the poor and rich worlds; (5) "A Programme Development Approach"; (6) "An Operational Mandate"; and (7) "Conclusion: The Benefits and Risks of Guidelines," discussing the key principles gathered from accumulated early childhood care and education experience. (Contains 28 references.) (BGC)

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INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN: THE ROLE OF PROGRAMME DEVELOPERS [1]

Nico Van Oudenhoven [2]

Paper given at the Conference of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD), Amsterdam, June 1994.

The interface between practitioners and researchers

It is common for professionals working in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to reflect on the specific roles of researchers and practitioners and on the ways they 'interface', or rather on how they should be relating to each other. These two groups of workers are not naturally given to cooperation and usually operate in two strongly separated worlds. A recent publication makes this abundantly clear and also shows that if they do come together that, in spite of high expectations, outcomes are disappointing to both practitioners and researchers (Eldering & Leseman, eds, 1993). However, the debate is continuing and it is likely that a new brand of professionals, who are capable of living in the cultures of both the researcher and the practitioner, will succeed in bridging the gap and in showing more satisfactory results. These professionals will be found mostly in the **intermediary organisations** that are currently establishing themselves between governmental structures, research institutions and people actually intervening in the lives of children (Van Oudenhoven 1992). Galjaart (1993) calls these new-style professionals "activists who think, or thinkers who act".

It is these people who form the interface between theory and practice. They have access to the researchers working 'at a distance'; who usually have larger networks, the prestige, means, and authority to validate experience and knowledge, and impressive technical expertise.

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[1] This paper builds on an earlier paper 'Researchers, Programme Developers, and the Children out there', in L. Eldering & P. Leseman (eds), 1993.

[2] **international CHILD DEVELOPMENT initiatives (iCDi)**, Leiden, Netherlands.

These are all qualities desperately needed by those working 'at proximity'. At the same time intermediary organisations, mostly Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as Grassroots Support Organisations (GSOs) and Membership Support Organisations (MSOs) offer meaning; have access to children, their families and communities; and can provide the ultimate testing ground for any intervention model or theory; they also produce a constant stream of innovations waiting to be tapped (Carroll 1992, Kool 1992, Serpell 1993).

Programme developers of funding agencies

There is another group of professionals who play a role of importance in ECCE and who also interact with practitioners and researchers. They occupy key positions in ministries, and national and international development or charitable organisations and direct the amount and the flow of monies for ECCE programmes. Their impact is particularly significant in poorer countries; in Africa 30% of the expenditures for young children come from the outside (Fisher 1991). Having their fingers on the strings of the purse, it is unavoidable that the responsible officers - or programme developers[3], as many of them should be called - make important decisions about the content and direction of the programmes they help to finance.

The point being made here it is that is virtually impossible for these programme developers to possess the same intimate knowledge about children and families as practitioners have, or to share or even to appreciate the sophisticated insights of ECCE researchers. Often they are not ECCE specialists at all. The staff make-up of the Bernard van Leer Foundation forms a case in point. This organization, with the unique mandate to help improve the conditions of young children in adverse circumstances, had per 1 March 1994 sixteen staff, out of a total body of about 55 employees, who were involved, to varying degrees, in programme activities. Their areas of specialisation were as follows:

Specialisation	Number	Level
Child Psychology	2	Ph.D; MA
Education	2	Ph.D; MA
Anthropology	2	Ph.D; MA
Sociology	2	Ph.D; Ph.D
Social Work	1	MA
Law	2	MA; MA
Language & Literature	1	MA
Economics	1	Ph.D
Development Studies/ Gender Studies	2	MA; MA
Political Sciences/ South Asian Cultures	1	MA
Social Geography	1	MA

[3] The more current label is 'programme officer' or 'programme specialist'.

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Most of them have 'field' experience and have worked for development organizations in a wide range of capacities. Very few, though, could be considered as ECCE specialists. And even the staff with a background in child development could hardly be considered as being up-to-date with recent events in this field. To put it rather crudely: the majority are neither really in touch with the children nor with the research community. The situation in other donor organizations and agencies devoted to children is not much different. Yet, these officers are expected to speak out on children's issues, to decide which programmes to fund, where, and for what children, assess outcomes of evaluations, and interact with researchers and practitioners. They often help to set the agenda at national and international fora as well as have an impact on the media.

Decision making by programme developers

The crucial question that has to be posed now is what principles inform and guide their thinking and action and how this is being done, and as a corollary, on what grounds can they justify their decisions? Undoubtedly, the availability of funds helps explain the ready acceptance of their arguments; the warm welcome extended to them; the appreciation of their wisdom; or their smooth interaction. Who would, when looking for scarce monies, wish to disagree with a potential, and willing donor or an influential, and sympathetic civil servant? In other words, would anybody still listen to them if they were to be stripped of access to financial resources or influence? what would they then have left to offer - or should have - in terms of substance? It will be argued here that programme developers, even stripped of their "power" ought to be able to make a contribution to ECCE. They could do so by bringing to bear their (1) expertise as development specialists; their (2) networking position, their (3) programme development approach; and by (4) deepening their institutional mandate.

Programme developers as development specialists

The view presented here is that funding bodies (government as well as donor agencies) with mandates for ECCE should first and foremost seek to improve their status as **development agencies.** Here the term development should be understood as in use by the United Nations. Essential elements in development are: a long and healthy life; knowledge and freedom; security; widening the number of options open to people; participation and responsibility; adherence to human rights; and a sustainable relation with the environment (UNDP 1991). It is obvious that defined in those terms, development is not just a concern for low-income countries, but for the 'developed world' as well.

On the basis of a developmental perspective it becomes feasible for programme developers to structure experience, offer an initial but basic frame of reference, and give direction to

intervention programmes.

An illustration may help to clarify the discussion. It is sufficiently understood how to turn a dilapidated, urban neighbourhood into a liveable place for young families. It is also widely known how to break up the isolation of mothers, or get the community to retake the initiative. Experience and examples of 'good practice' are plentiful. Yet, parts of many cities, almost anywhere, look more as if they have been set up for rats rather than for children; and the situation is only getting worse. Why is this one may wonder. The answer has nothing to do with expert- or intimate knowledge of children: it is squarely in the domain of development thinking and practice. It has much more to do with the re-weaving of the social fabric, legislation, planning, or the setting of priorities.

Drawing on general development theory and practice, programme developers could 'interface' meaningfully between researchers, implementers, policy makers, and other funders. They can bring in their own expertise on such topics such as: capacity building; sustainability, cultural relevance, empowerment and participation, planning and management, intersecting needs of groups involved, advocacy and social mobilisation, going-to-scale, evaluation and the role of research (see also Wazir, in press). These topics are in the main neither raised by researchers nor by practitioners and yet they have to be addressed if any intervention is to attain its objectives, sustainability or scale-dimension.

Pivotal in the theory and practice of development work is the idea that the 'target population' should participate, exercise control over their own lives, and be empowered to relate on equal terms with the professionals. In ECCE this means that children, their parents - especially their mothers- and their communities should be taken extremely seriously and function as active players. It is interesting to note that Serpell (1993), coming from a child development perspective arrives at the same conclusion about the importance of empowering parents.

It is well known that professionals, in their efforts to solve the problems for the poor or 'marginalised', tend to formulate solutions, control and implement programmes. In fact, they then end up emasculating instead of enabling or empowering children. In this traditional 'helping' mould, they take away the initiative from families, and, with this, their self-confidence, dignity, independence and capacity to formulate their own coping strategies (see Achterhuis 1982, Barker 1987, 1994, De Winter 1986 and Gottlieb 1985).

The common thread in most of the successful programmes or projects for disadvantaged children and families is that in some way or other the parents (mothers) can come together and talk about things that matter to them.

Project success is almost invariably related to the presence of

social support groups or substantial social networks. Could it be that parents' groups are a more potent factor in ECCE programmes than parental involvement in the (pre-) school environment of the child? Richter (1993) points out that the very fact of having interpersonal relationships and of having friends enables poor mothers in South Africa to keep their families going.

Networking

In a survey of developments in education research carried out almost fifteen years ago Myers (1981) complains that institutionalized research in the developing world is, although growing rapidly, under-financed, uncoordinated, fragile and tied to foreign assistance. The research communities of the poor and rich worlds are largely disconnected. He then goes on to state that informal and personal contacts are still more important for disseminating research than is the written word. The recent Eldering and Leseman (1993) report, which is the outcome of a week-long conference of researchers, practitioners and programme developers, shows that the situation has not changed significantly since then: 'Western' research still dominates the scene and the input by practitioners is still limited.

Staff of funding organizations can play a useful role by acting as 'brokers' between the representatives of the various groups and organizations. The very nature of their position and the availability of non)committed or flexible funds puts them in an ideal situation. Indeed, as it happens, a great deal of information exchange initiated by programme developers is about who is doing what and where and about connecting people. It is not uncommon for programme developers, with their bird's eye views on a country or region, to bring people together who have been living together without being aware of each other's existence.

The manner by which programme developers themselves obtain and process information is different from researchers and practitioners. Whereas researchers require knowledge through study and investigative work, and practitioners through interaction with the target group, programme developers work largely by memoranda, summary reports, meetings and also networking. The validity of data is checked rather by a process of **triangulation** (three independent sources confirming that the data are correct) than by autonomous intellectual appropriation. The risk for the programme developer of becoming an **'airport intellectual'** is therefore quite real.

There are, of course, more risks to the networking initiatives of funding organizations. So is the entry to the lives of the poor and to the people working with them securely blocked? Chambers (1988) and Hancock (1991), among others, demonstrate the near impossibility of getting into contact with poor families.

It is given to few outsiders to know poor people or to get access to their knowledge. Hancock is particularly gloomy about the positive impact that the donor community has on the lives of poor people. He presents a convincing picture of experts who - in the name of working for the poor - only seem to be helping themselves, albeit at the expense of their clients. For many people living in poverty the term 'development' has become synonymous with alienation, increased vulnerability, and misfortune. In addition, given their position at a distance, programme developers mainly get into contact with the more visible, articulated, better managed NGOs. The people really in need fall outside the purview of programme developers.

To mitigate this risk, a further logical step in networking, pioneered in ECCE[4] is to enable project staff to develop their own networks with minimum interference from the programme developer. It is known that, given the proper mandate, GSOs and MSOs are effective in reaching the poor as well as liaising with kindred groups (Carroll 1993). Esman and Uphof (1988) have shown that the quality of these groups is also determined by their embeddedness in horizontal and vertical networks. The primary concern of programme developers is then rather to see to it that project staff <u>are actively engaged</u> in networking than that programme developers are actually aware of the <u>nature</u> of the networking by project staff. This step entails a further recognition that project staff 'know better'. The caveat should be made that NGOs supported by donors may use their networking funds to secure their privileged position at the expense of less endowed NGOs.

Another, not well-researched risk affecting the programme developer is what has become known as 'donor fatigue' Lacking a firm rooting in either research or the lives of children, information from these fields reaching the programme developer may readily look similar, monotonous, or even boring. It then becomes tempting to look for something 'new' or in the development jargon: for innovations or alternative solutions. Fashions rather than the needs of children may determine the agendas of funding agencies. There is however a growing body of evidence that pleads for strengthening approaches that are already in place and to build on these. Myers (1992) has demonstrated that, in principle, the ECCE community has the knowledge and the skills to address the needs of children and their families. At the level of 'the state of the art' there is sufficient agreement on the various ways of how to attain these and to improve 'the state of practice'. There is, indeed, a global trend to look closer at 'good practice' and to be more cautious with supporting experimental projects, innovations, and the like. A strong case is made by the International Youth Foundation. This organization, although mainly concerned about an older age group of children (five till twenty years) has

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[4] Beth Jones, Huub Schreurs, Rekha Wazir and Nico van Oudenhoven developed and tested these ideas with staff of projects funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

taken the radical step to invest in 'what works' rather than in 'finding new solutions' (International Youth Foundation 1993).

A programme development approach[5]

Grantmaking organizations traditionally focus on individual projects. Their programmes consist of collections of **separate** projects. The projects making up these collections have little in common with each other but for the fact that they are covered by the particular mandate of the financing organization. The USA programme of the Bernard van Leer Foundation at the end of the 1980s provides a telling illustration. The Foundation supported projects with such varied target groups as Blacks (Alabama), Hispanics (Albuquerque), Indians (Denver), Whites (Appalachia), teenage mothers (New York) and estate tenants (Boston).
The shortcomings of this single-project approach are obvious. Project staff become inward-looking, the main concerns revolve upon the agreed-upon plan of action and serving their own constituency. When funding for the next phase is anticipated, and this is often the case, not enough is done about embedding the project locally. Coalition building, securing alternative forms of financing, or opening up discussions on the merits of the project can easily be ignored. Increased coverage, institutionalising of the team, influencing other organisations, or mobilising local resources will not soon occur. Separated and isolated projects will not produce any synergism, while the supervisory task for the programme developer will put a heavy demand on time and resources.

The awareness is now growing that interventions should move away from the single project approach to developing comprehensive programmes. Programmes is here defined as a series of events seeking to attain clearly formulated goals. A programme consists of a coherent set of inter-related, well-described interventions, a plan of action with concrete objectives, strategies, and outcomes. It follows an anticipated time path and operates within an established financial framework. The discrete interventions within a programme could be manifold, short- or long-term, and be carried out by distinct, but collaborating organizations or individuals. In addition to activities benefitting children and their families undertaken by child-or family workers, programmes could harbour initiatives by others and could lead, for example, to extensive networking, documentaries, training courses, seminars, monographs, or new lines of educational materials. Essential to effective programmes is their own capacity to generate learning and rejuvenation.

Constructed in this way, programmes touch on a wide range of

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[5] These ideas have been developed with Rekha Wazir, Huub Schreurs and other programme specialists while the author worked for the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

aspects. These relate to finance, education, evaluation, child development, publications, training, networking, community development, sustainability, parental involvement, policy making.

It is beyond the capability of programme developers to give expert feedback on all these issues, at all times. Thus, instead of attempting to attend to all programme matters, programme developers should opt for forms of overall **programme management**. In programme management, programme specialists act as 'second line' workers, seeking to create the right conditions on the ground. Mechanisms or tools to meet these tasks are available. Often, existing intermediary structures can assist in formulating and setting of the frameworks for intervention; the organisation of thematic workshops; and locally directed action research and evaluation. As a creator of the right kind of conditions, especially with the help of locally existing intermediary organisations, the need for the programme developer to be an expert on child development becomes less pressing. Affinity with the subject matter, an understanding of development issues, and a willingness to learn from the field then become more important requirements.

An operational mandate

The actions of funding bodies such as ministries, but especially charitable and development organizations are governed by their **mandates**. These are by and large philosophical, global and lofty statements. In ECCE these mandates as a rule look like declarations of intent such as "enhancing the well-being of children", " the attainment of children's full potential", or " helping children become responsible citizens". Phrased in this general way, mandates allow for a maximum number of people to agree with or to feel inspired by them as well as provide sufficient room for the executing organization to mount a programme, not seldom as they see fit (see Lissner 1977).

Operating within their mandates, the intervention programmes of development agencies are responses to demands from the field as well as to internal political considerations. Needs, availability of funds, and prevailing views in development practice determine these field-based demands. Research does not feature highly in these programmes[6]. Developments in research and theory are seldom used as guiding principles when formulating projects. Advances in child development research and theory do not form the underpinnings of field projects and if used at all they are greatly diluted or generalised and make little impact on the day-to-day implementation of programmes. However, development organizations, in their efforts to become more professional and specialised, will seek to further detail the mandate and with this to strengthen the theoretical foundations so as to arrive at more concrete operational

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[6] This paragraph draws on the text by Wazir (in press)

directives. This proves to be a most difficult assignment and discussions get quickly bogged down in scientific as well as political controversies. Seemingly simple questions such as what is exactly meant by the 'well-being of children', or 'their full potential' appear almost impossible to answer.

For example, Scheffler's study 'Of Human Potential', especially written to shed light on the issue of children's potential did little in the way of clarifying this issue or of influencing the mandate of the organization that commissioned the study, if it was read at all (Scheffler 1983)[7].

It is evident that mandates have to accommodate not only research findings but also the sentiments expressed at field level. In this light the recommendations drawn up in the Eldering and Leseman (1993) report are noteworthy. Although not spectacular, they reflect a consensus among practitioners, researchers and programme developers. The recommendations highlight the need to look at the elusive 'whole child' and 'the child in context'; the importance of building on existing inherent strengths in families and communities, of a genuine dialogue among all parties involved, of the crucial role of women (mothers); on the special role of 'para-professionals; and on the benefits of an ongoing dialogue between theory and practice. These recommendations, when incorporated in the mandate of ECCE organizations would have long-term consequences for programme development. However, ECCE development organizations should work out their mandates or operational philosophies with greater resolution. In a recent study, Nunes (in press) goes beyond these recommendations. She takes the 'Environment of the Child' as subject of her analysis. She did so as ECCE development agencies intervene in the environments of children often without a clear understanding of what components and processes make up this environment or what kind of environment should be envisaged as a result of the intervention. Her findings, particularly those about the crucial role of the caretaker (mother) as a mediator between conditions of poverty and the developing child, are exceedingly relevant. A mandated concern for children should, in this view, also include a concern for the children's caretakers (mothers).

Conclusion: the benefits and risks of guidelines

A number of key principles can be deduced from the accumulated ECCE experience, especially over the last two decades. The first lesson, perhaps, is that a 'model' for intervention for children does not exist, and should not even be aspired to. Elaborate models are seen as having limited value. Their replication or dissemination will have to respond and adjust

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[7] In 1979 the Harvard Graduate School of Education was asked by the Bernard van Leer Foundation to assess the state of scientific knowledge concerning human potential and its realization. Scheffler's book was one of the outcomes.

over time and to local situations and by doing so diminish their function as models. Even when applied in the original setting, models have to be continuously modified. They also quickly lose their exemplary features once the experimental phase is over and the specialists and the extra support have gone.

There is, however, a growing body of understanding of what will or will not work under what sort of circumstances and why. An ever-growing list of 'guidelines' is emerging.

These key principles include the following (for example see Grant 1989):

1. a minimal infrastructure has to be in place;
2. target groups need to participate in the design and control of programmes;
3 women should be fully involved;
4 activities should be environmentally sustainable;
5. programmes should include the 'poorest of the poor';
6. development should be allowed to grow naturally, no massive changes should be introduced at once;
7. social mobilisation should support intervention programmes.

These statements probably apply to any intervention directed at any form of social development. Activities for children should, in addition, take into account these other considerations (see for example: Myers 1992, Van Oudenhoven 1989, 1991):

8. be community-based and culturally relevant;
9. inclusion of parents and recognition of their needs;
10. inclusion of non-formal education;
11. availability of management skills;
12. integrated child care and eduction, focusing on the whole child;
13. acceptance of the child as an active protagonist;
14. realization of the importance of increasing the knowledge base about children; and most importantly
15. acceptance that the well-being of children should be addressed in the context of all human action.

UNICEF's 'Facts for Life' also forms a good source book of guidelines and recommendations for programme developers. It tells clearly and convincingly what to do in the key areas of child development (UNICEF undated). These guidelines, or rather strategic principles, should be brought into the design of interventions. They should belong to the regular 'tool kit' of programme developers and be weighed against the constraints and possibilities of the local context. The metaphor of a 'cookbook' could be used with the good cook knowing exactly what ingredients to use for what occasion and in what measure.

Programme developers, working under pressure and far removed from both practice or theory may be tempted to use these guidelines as 'checklists' or as stop gap phrases, as the intended meaning of these guidelines and their relationship with the development of children has not been grasped fully. Although 'Facts for Life' is very strong on what to do, it falls short on why and particularly how the described processes work. And it is exactly the understanding of the nature of these processes that are essential in programme development.

To avoid mechanical and indiscriminate application of these guidelines, with subsequent detrimental effects for children, programme developers will have no choice but to enter the dialogue with research and practice. For many programme developers this move will not come easily.

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